AQA

GCSE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 2 Writers' viewpoints and perspectives

Insert

The two sources that follow are:

Source A: 20th Century literary non-fiction

One's Company by Peter Fleming

An extract from a travel book, published in 1933

Source B: 19th Century non-fiction

Records of a Girlhood by Fanny Kemble

An extract from a letter, published in 1878

Please turn the page over to see the sources

Source A

Source A is an extract from a travel book in which Peter Fleming describes his train journey on the Trans-Siberian Railway in 1933. The journey is over nine thousand kilometres and takes more than a week to complete.

And now the journey was almost over. There is no more luxurious sensation than what may be described as the 'end of term' feeling. I felt very content. After tomorrow there would be no more trips to the dining-car; no more of that black bread, in consistency and flavour suggesting rancid peat; no more of that equally earthy tea; no more of a monk's existence; no more days entirely blank of action. It was true that I did not know what I was going to do, that I had nothing very specific to look forward to. But I knew what I was going to stop doing, and that, for the moment, was enough.

I wandered along the train to my compartment, undressed and got into my bed. As I did so, I noticed for the first time that the number on my berth was thirteen. For a long time, I could not sleep but eventually I drifted off.

All of a sudden there was a frightful jarring, followed by a crash. I sat up in my berth. From the rack above me my heaviest suitcase was cannonaded down, catching me with fearful force on either knee-cap. This is the end of the world, I thought, and in addition they have broken both my legs. My little world was tilted drunkenly. The window showed me nothing except a few fields. It was six o'clock. I began to dress. I felt very much annoyed. But I climbed out of the carriage into a refreshingly spectacular world and the annoyance passed. The Trans-Siberian Express train sprawled foolishly down the embankment. The mail van and the dining-car, which had been in front, lay on their sides at the bottom. Behind them the five sleeping cars, headed by my own, were disposed in attitudes which became less and less grotesque until you got to the last, which had remained, primly, on the rails. Fifty yards down the line, the engine, which had parted company with the train, was dug in, snorting steam, on top of the embankment. It had a defiant and naughty look; it was definitely conscious of indiscretion.

It would be difficult to imagine a nicer sort of railway accident. No one was hurt. The weather was ideal. And the whole thing was done in just the right sort of theatrical manner, with lots of twisted steel and splintered woodwork and turf scarred deeply with demoniac force.

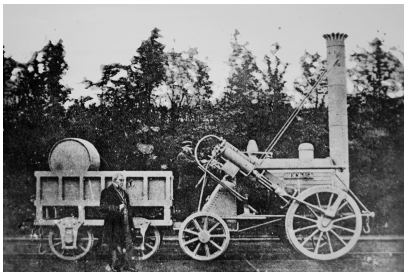
This was great fun: a comical and violent climax to an interlude in which comedy and violence had been altogether too lacking for my tastes. It was good to lie back in the long grass on a little hill and meditate upon that sprawling scrap-heap. There she lay, in the middle of the wide green plain; the fastest train, the Trans-Siberian Luxury Express. For more than a week she had bullied us. She had knocked us about when we went to clean our teeth in the little bathroom, she had jogged our elbows when we wrote, and when we read, she made the print dance tiresomely before our eyes. Her windows we might not open on account of the dust, and when closed they had proved a perpetual attraction to small, sabotaging boys with stones. She had annoyed us in a hundred little ways: by spilling tea in our laps, by running out of butter, by regulating our life. She had been our prison. We had not liked her. Now she was down and out. We left her lying there, a broken, buckled toy, a thick black worm without a head, awkwardly twisted: a thing of no use.

Source B

Source B is an extract from a letter written by Fanny Kemble to a friend about her first ride on a steam train in 1830, when she was 21. The steam engine had recently been invented by George Stephenson and he was also on this ride.

A normal sheet of writing paper is enough for love, but only a large sheet can contain my raptures about my railroad journey. And now I will give you an account of my excursion yesterday…

A party of sixteen persons was ushered into a courtyard where there stood a carriage of a peculiar construction, prepared for our reception. It was a long-bodied vehicle with seats placed across it, back-to-back; the one we were in had six of these benches and was a sort of uncovered carriage. The carriage was set in motion by only a push and rolled with us down a slope into a tunnel which forms the entrance to the railroad.



Here, we were introduced to the little train engine which was to drag us along the rails. She (for they make these curious little fire-horses all mares*) consisted of a boiler, a stove, a small platform, a bench, and behind the bench a barrel containing enough water to prevent her being thirsty on our journey. She goes upon wheels which are her feet and are moved by bright steel legs called pistons which are propelled by steam. The reins of this wonderful beast are a small steel handle, which applies or withdraws the steam from its legs or pistons, so that a child might manage it. The coals, which are its oats, were under the bench. This snorting little animal, which I felt rather inclined to pat, was then harnessed to our carriage. Mr Stephenson and I took our seats on the bench of the train engine and we set off at about ten miles an hour.

As the steam-horse was unable to go up and down hill, the railroad was kept at a certain level, and appeared sometimes to sink below the surface of the earth, and sometimes to rise above it. It was most incredible. Almost from the start the track was cut through the solid rock which formed a wall on either side of it, about sixty feet high.

You can't imagine how strange it seemed to be journeying on thus, without any visible cause of progress other than the magical machine, with its flying white breath and rhythmical, unvarying pace, between these rocky walls. Then, when I reflected that these great masses of stone had been cut asunder to allow our passage far below the surface of the earth, I felt as if no fairy tale was ever half so wonderful as what I saw. Bridges were thrown from side to side across the top of these cliffs, and the people looking down upon us from them seemed like dolls standing in the sky. You cannot conceive what that sensation of cutting the air was; the motion is as smooth as possible. I could either have read or written; and as it was, I stood up, and with my bonnet off, drank the air before me. When I closed my eyes this sensation of flying was quite delightful, and strange beyond description. Yet, strange as it was, I had a perfect sense of security and not the slightest fear, as this brave little she-dragon of ours flew on.

We had now come fifteen miles and stopped where the railroad traversed a wide and deep valley. Mr. Stephenson escorted me from the train down to the bottom of this ravine, over which, to keep the track level, he has thrown a magnificent viaduct of nine arches, the middle one of which is seventy feet high, through which we saw the whole of this beautiful little valley. It was lovely and wonderful beyond all words.

We then re-joined the rest of the passengers and the carriage set off at its utmost speed, thirty-five miles an hour, swifter than a bird flies, on our return journey.

When I add that this pretty little creature can run either backward or forward, I believe I have given you an account of all the train's abilities.

Glossary

* female horses

END OF SOURCES

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